

## Town of Milan Comprehensive Plan

## 5. Historical Resources

### Chapter Highlights:

Milan is fortunate to have a number of buildings and historic vistas that date to the early history of the Town and are an important part of our rural heritage. Designation of the most significant of these as critical environmental areas will enable special consideration in our planning and subdivision processes. The CP also recommends a program of recognition be instituted for property owners who preserve historic buildings.



**Town of Milan Comprehensive Plan****5. Historical Resources****A. Introduction**

To review the historical resources for the 2005 Comprehensive Plan, the Town Historian, Patrick Higgins, led a committee with Richard Plass and Tom Daily. They reviewed the recommendations and the status of 62 historic resources identified in the 1986 Master Plan, and concluded that the list did not represent a complete list of the homes that should appear on an inventory of historic homes. A decision was made to address important historic structures other than homes (with a couple of notable exceptions), and to document some of the historic areas remaining in Milan today. An assessment was also completed of Milan's cemeteries. The chapter on "Historic Resources" contained in the 1986 Master Plan remains a viable inventory for historic preservation in the Town and it is included in the appendix.

**B. Milan Historic Structures**

The following historic sites in Milan warrant special consideration as land use and development decisions are made to preserve the historic character of these sites for future generations.

1) The Lafayette House in Lafayetteville built in 1824 and was a hotel and a stage coach stop. Its historic fabric has been modified by various additions and renovations over the years. Some may have been completed without the appropriate permits from the Town.

2) The Rowe Church is a very significant building in the town for both its Greek Revival architecture and, along with the Rowe Parsonage, its continuing role as the last and only place of worship in Milan today. The founder, Johannes Rowe (Rau), purchased 911 acres of land in Milan in 1760. In 1800 he established a Methodist church in the town known as "Rowe Methodist Church." The original Rowe house was across from the church. Coupled with the Victorian Shelley home (1860) set back along Rowe Road, these structures complete a visual setting that is a most significant historic vista. This area deserves protection from encroaching commerce and modernity.

3) The Jackson Corners Store at Jackson Corners was established in 1773 by Hugh Rae, who was born in Ireland in 1741. He came to America in 1758; in 1767 he married Margaret Knickerbocker, the daughter of Peter Knickerbocker who owned the property where the store is located. Rae was a patriot, serving as Captain of the North East Company of the First Regiment in the American Revolution. He was a signer of a protest document against the English government in 1775. Due to Rae's involvement in the American Revolution, the store did a lively trade with the Continental Army—which nearly proved disastrous, as payment for provisions was made in Continental script. Over the years the general store served as a stage-stop, a hotel, a doctor's office, post office and polling place. "The Jackson Corners Association for Detention of Horse Thieves", still in existence, was organized in 1871, and held their early meetings in the store.

4) The Fulton Homestead. First owned by John Fulton, the deed was recorded October 12, 1795, before the founding of Milan; the homestead was in the Fulton family until 1933. Located on Fulton Homestead Road, a short dirt road that was originally part of Turkey Hill Road until the road was straightened, the classic home and barns are sited close to the road and provide an excellent perspective of Milan in its earliest days.

5) The Ruins of Shookville Church. The church was build by the Shook brothers in 1834 to serve the Milan community. The ruins are in very bad shape and are getting worse with each passing year.

6) The Wilcox House in Wilcox Park. The house was the residence of the Great Lady of Milan, Irene Wilcox. Mrs. Wilcox, in memory of her husband and her son who was killed in an auto accident,

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bequeathed the house and land to Dutchess County. Contrary to her will, the house has fallen into decay. Mrs. Wilcox also donated to Milan its Town Hall and funds for its maintenance, as well as endowing the upkeep of the Rowe Church and numerous area cemeteries. Much of the character of Milan today is a tribute to her generosity.

7) Rock City Grange Hall. Now a commercial establishment, Sheep's Clothing, in Rock City, the Rock City Grange recently celebrated its 100th anniversary.

8) Milan Railroad Station. The Rhinebeck and Connecticut Railroad was incorporated in 1871. Thomas Cornell, owner of the Cornell Steamship Company and president of the Roundout and Oswego Railroad, devised a plan to transport coal from Kingston to New England. The coal would come across the Hudson River in barges to Rhinecliff; from there it would be transported by rail to New England. The route originated in Rhinecliff and swung north via Red Hook, then northeast to the Cokertown Station at Spring Lake Road. The next stop was Jackson Corners. The former railroad station is now a private house and stands on the banks of the Roeliff Jansen Kill east of Academy Hill Road. The old rail bed is still visible in the woods. It continued north to Columbia County and on to Connecticut. In 1874 its new line was already hauling freight and in 1875 it began a passenger service. The passengers claimed it went so slowly they could pick huckleberries from the bushes as they passed; thus the nickname The Huckleberry or Hucklebush Line. The line ceased operations in the early twentieth century.

9) Battenfeld's Greenhouses. In 1906, two immigrants from Germany, Fred and Frank Battenfeld, purchased a farm on Milan Hill Road and entered the violet business, an industry introduced to the Rhinebeck area in the latter part of the nineteenth century. By 1928, changing fashions brought a decline in the violet business. In 1930, the Battenfelds sold their farm on Milan Hill Road and purchased property on Route 199. They built greenhouses and switched from growing violets to anemones. They are one of the major growers of anemones today. In 1949, Richard Battenfeld, the present owner's father, also started a Christmas tree farm. The greenhouses and plantations are a prominent view along Route 199.

**C. Milan Cemeteries and Archaeology**

Milan's heritage is also represented by its cemeteries. Milan's cemeteries are scattered all over its landscape; some are backyard family plots. Many burial spots have been lost through the years; however, the major burial grounds in the town are known. These cemeteries reflect the history of the early residents of Milan and are a visible reminder of the continuity of time and institutions so important to a town's character.

1) Teats Cemetery. East of Shookville, abandoned but being maintained.

2) Shookville Cemetery. Beside ruins of the Shookville, abandoned but maintained.

3) Yoemans Cemetery. Lafayetteville, abandoned but being maintained by the town of Milan.

4) Indian Burial Ground. Jackson Corners, abandoned, not being maintained, status of deed not known.

5) Quaker Cemetery. Morehouse Lane. Now the property of the town of Milan, it is the burial site of the first supervisor of the Town of Milan, Stephen Thorn, and his wife.

6) Rowe Cemetery. Route 199, associated with the Rowe Church and still being used.

7) Milan Union Cemetery. Milan Hollow Road, maintained by a cemetery committee and still being used.

8) Ferris Cemetery. Ferris Lane, abandoned but on private property.

There are also many private burial spots in Milan that were used just for the immediate family.

The New York State Historical Society has identified the northwest corner of Milan as a site of archaeological importance. Lake Warackamak's name may reflect Native American history; it is so-

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named on maps from the eighteenth century, long before Milan's founding. Arrowheads or points found in this area have been dated at around 3,000 years old. More work should be done to understand this history. Specific sensitive archaeological sites are not established at this time for Town planning purposes.

**D. Historic Hamlets and Areas of Town**

1) Lafayetteville. Among the first settlers in Milan was the family of Maltiah Bowman. They arrived in Dutchess County around 1780 and settled in what is now Lafayetteville, at the current intersection of North Road and Route 199. They were a prosperous family and built a house where the present Lafayette House now stands. The present Lafayette House was built in 1824 and was a hotel and a stage coach stop. In 1824 the Marquis de LaFayette visited the area and the hamlet took its name from LaFayette. It was a prosperous community, rich in trade; it remained that way until the railroads came to Pine Plains and the business followed the railroads.

2) Rock City. In 1799, John Travers purchased 129 acres of land in what is now Rock City. He built a grist mill there, and was later joined by Henry Travis, who built a saw mill. The population grew and so did business in the hamlet, located at the intersection of Route 199 and Route 308. It was originally known as Travers Mill until the name was changed to Rock City.

3) Jackson Corners. Jackson Corners was once a commercial crossroads at the junction of roads to the Hudson River, Taconic iron mines and Connecticut. It was a stopping point for the stage on the Nobletown Road and later a stop on the Rhinebeck and Connecticut Railroad.

4) Case's Corners. Formerly known as Milanville, it also was a busy hamlet. Stephen Thorn (the first Milan Town supervisor) owned a store and ran a post office there. In October 1818, he decided to change the name of the post office from West Northeast to Milan. (The origins of the name Milan are still unknown.) This area takes its name from a later merchant, Rensselaer Case, who ran the post office there in 1867.

5) Wildey's Corners. The Wildey family purchased one of the original lots, #19, from the Little Nine Partners patent, a large tract of land granted by the British Crown. James Wildey took possession of it in 1806. It remained with the Wildey family until sold by Emery Wildey in 1940. The original house, built in the early 1800s, remains occupied and represents a design style common at that time in the Milan township.

**E. State Historic Markers**

Four locations in Milan were recognized with New York State historical markers when this program was active. Noted above are three of them: the Jackson Corners Store, the Fulton Homestead, and the Indian Burial Ground. The fourth is Nobletown Road, which before 1798 ran from the post road in Livingston, through Gallatin and Ancram and into New England.

**F. Previous Recommendations**

The 1986 Master Plan recommended that the actions listed below be taken to preserve Milan's past. These items remain to be completed.

- Define a historic overlay district for the town.

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- Amend land use regulations to include the protection of historic resources.
- Provide accommodations in Town Hall for the Town historian to store, access and utilize historic records.
- Continue the historic structure inventory work, using the Building Structure Inventory Form developed by the Division of Historic Preservation, New York State Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, or an appropriate Town form.

**G. Goals and Visions**

The citizens of Milan value their historic resources. In the 2000 survey, 88.1% of respondents indicated that “preservation of architectural character and historic places is important,” and 85.9% said that it was “Most important/important” to maintain historic structures. It is important that Milan understands and appreciates its cultural and historic resources (e.g., structures, cemeteries, and historic sites, including Native American archaeology) and that the Town supports their protection and preservation through appropriate land use regulations.

**H. Recommendations**

- 1) Complete a historic structure inventory on historic homes as recommended and identified in the previous Master Plan.
- 2) Create a Historic Overlay District in the Town zoning regulations or incorporate historic structures into the definition of Critical Environmental Areas; display these sites on appropriate maps and provide guidance to the Planning Board regarding development in the vicinity of historic structures.
- 3) The Town Historian should explore avenues to maintain ruins of the Shookville Church and recommend appropriate action to the Town Board.
- 4) The Town should review the County’s stewardship of the Wilcox House and take appropriate action to respect the requirements of Irene Wilcox’s will.
- 5) The Town Building Inspector should review the status and use of the Lafayette House.
- 6) The Town Historian should initiate, as appropriate, steps for the Town to take over and maintain abandoned cemeteries.
  - a) Teats Cemetery (maintained by Shookville Cemetery Committee, exposed in perpetuity)
  - b) Shookville Cemetery (same, maintained by Shookville Cemetery Committee)
  - c) Yoeman’s Cemetery (abandoned but being maintained by town of Milan)
  - d) Indian Burial Grounds (not being maintained, very small area, few stone markers)
  - e) Ferris Cemetery (abandoned and on private property)
- 7) The Town should develop criteria for and establish a Milan Historical Site program to provide recognition to property owners who preserve historical properties and to provide special consideration regarding impact of surrounding development through the Historic Overlay District or Critical Environmental Area designation.
- 8) The Town should explore known information on archeological sites in Milan, and evaluate appropriateness of further archeological studies.
- 9) The Town should prepare a brochure on the history of Milan.

**I. Implementation Strategies``**

- 1) Seek grants or aid to assist in completing the historic structure inventory.
- 2) Use the historic structure inventory to prepare Historic District Overlay guidelines.
- 3) Provide office and dedicated storage space for Town historian.

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- 4) Utilize town web site to expand awareness of Town history and seek materials and volunteers to assist the Town historian.
- 5) Seek grant moneys to complete a history of Milan booklet.
- 6) Seek grant moneys to conduct an archeological review of Town of Milan.